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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2016

Concern over NPCA

MPP wants audit of Conservation
authority.
Page 2

Discovery of bombs

Man charged after house fire.
Page 2

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INPORT NEWS

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Stocking up



BERND FRANK/
POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Donations of
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are boxed and
labeled for
shipping at the
Christian Life
Assembly on
Barrick Road,
the dropoff
location for the
annual Port
Colborne and
Wainfleet Food
Drive.

See more
on A3.

HomeTownRealEstateTeam.ca

Michael Smith
Sales Representative

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Forster wants forensic audit of NPCA

BILL SAWCHUK
Postmedia Network

Cindy Forster is upping the ante and calling for a forensic audit of Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

The Welland NPP wrote an open letter last Monday to the Ministry of Natural Resources requesting a financial audit of the NPCA immediately.

Last Wednesday, she called for a much deeper dive into the operations at the conservation authority.

"When we hear that they already send audited financial statements to the Region, what you are looking at is what the agency gives us in terms of a balance sheet, income and expenditures," Forster said. "They are just using general accounting principles."

"With a forensic audit, you are looking for specific things."

Forster said the effectiveness and the credibility of the conservation authority "appeared to be at stake."

Carmen D'Angelo, CAO of the conservation authority, responded by e-mail and detailed some of the steps his agency takes with regard to public accountability and transparency.

D'Angelo said the NPCA conducts annual audits as required by the Conservation Authorities Act. The audits are distributed to the conservation authority's funding partners, which in addition to Niagara include the City of Hamilton, Haldimand County and the provincial government.

D'Angelo said the audited



FORSTER



D'ANGELO



TIMMIS

statements are also presented at open to the public board meetings.

In addition, the NPCA provides monthly financial statements to its board, which are also available on the NPCA website.

"NPCA is one of the leading conservation authorities following these best management practices," D'Angelo said.

D'Angelo directed specific questions about Forster's call

for a forensic audit to Bruce Timmins, a regional councillor and chairman of the NPCA.

"It is starting to get legal," Timmins said. "We will have some discussions and get some legal consultation on it before we make any comment. All our operational statements are up to level."

"She [Forster] is asking the ministry about it. That would be a ministry decision. We are not a body of the Region or a municipality so it would

be up to the province."

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Natural Resources confirmed conservation authorities are legislated to undergo an independent, third-party audit of their financial statements each and every year.

The spokesperson added that local municipalities can also ask for a further investigation should they deem it necessary.

"The bottom line is the minister can't order an audit as the MPP seems to think she can," the spokesperson said. Forster also referenced problems a group of concerned citizens are having getting FOI requests answered.

The citizen's group — which has authored a report titled "A call for Accountabil-

ity at the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority" — has been looking at the internal operations of the conservation authority. A private citizen and whistleblower, Ed Smith, called on Niagara Region council to audit the conservation authority in June. That request was turned down.

"We are trying to get FOIs answered," Forster said. "Ed Smith and a group of activists are trying to get answers."

"In one instance, the NPCA refused to provide the documents," Forster said. "When Ed appealed, they said they couldn't locate the documents. If you are spending \$40,000 or \$50,000 in contracts, you should be able to provide documentation."

See AUDIT on A15

Charges laid for bombs

Postmedia Network

A 41-year-old man has been charged with a number of crimes following the discovery of homemade bombs during a Welland house fire last month.

Last Wednesday Niagara Regional Police arrested a male they allege is responsible for the fire at 79 Park St. on Oct. 16.

The arrest stems from a joint investigation by the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal, Welland Fire and Emergency Services and the NRP's explosive disposal unit, police said in a news release issued last Wednesday night.

Jason Grant of Welland is charged with arson, mischief endangering life, possession of explosives for unlawful purpose, and explosives with intent to cause an explosion.

Grant was released with conditions following a bail hearing last Thursday at the St. Catharines courthouse.

His next court date has been scheduled for Dec. 2 at 9 a.m. in Welland.

At the time of the early afternoon fire, it was reported that a 41-year-old man escaped from a second-floor window of the house



LAURA BARTON/POSTMEDIA FILE PHOTO

Charges have been laid against a 41-year-old man in connection to this Oct. 16 house fire in Welland where a number of improvised explosive devices were found by responding firefighters.

See BOMBS on A15

I.aM.mE

Dance Crew

11 NOVEMBER 7PM

The reigning champions of MTV's America's Best Dance Crew led by So You Think You Can Dance semi-finalist JaJa Vankove.

FirstOntarioPAC.ca

Box Office: 905-688-0722

St. Catharines

Feeding a community need

BERND FRANKÉ
Postmedia Network

There were two armies in south Niagara on the weekend that didn't travel on their stomachs.

Instead, the friendly occupying forces — about 500 strong in Welland and 300 in Port Colborne — were on a mission to ensure the stomachs of the less-fortunate will stay filled over the coming months.

A total of 80 teams in Welland and 27 in Port Colborne blanketed their communities Saturday morning. Each was assigned a route and they drove up and down streets in cars, pickups and SUVs, and went door-to-door on foot collecting bags and, sometimes, boxes of donated non-perishable food items left on doorsteps and porches.

Diapers and personal hygiene products also were collected, sorted and boxed for shipping to three food banks in Welland and one in Port Colborne. To an outside observer, as well as to many first-time participants, the beehive of activity at Club Richelieu on River Road in Welland and at Christian Life Assembly on Barrick Road in Port Colborne resembled bedlam on steroids. The square foot of confusion.

But there was a fluidity to the methodical madness of what Club Richelieu member Alain Breton, an organizer of the food drive in Welland, called "organized chaos."

"It looks like people are working at cross purposes, but somehow it works," Club Richelieu president Benoît Mercier said in agreement. "There are enough returning volunteers who know what they're doing, and what needs to get done, so it always gets done."

It was the 24th annual food drive in Welland and Club Richelieu has never thought twice about offering use of its facility on River Road.

"That's why we exist — to help others," Breton said.

Helping hands spanned the generations, from Armand Gervais, 85, a Club Richelieu member since 1957, who was serving soup to volunteers in Welland, to 12-year-old Caleb Scapillato of Crystal Beach who was participating in his ninth food drive in Port Colborne.

No, that's not a typo. Scapillato has been accompanying his grandmother Lise Lafon-



PHOTOS BY BERND FRANKÉ/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

Sorting donations of non-perishable food is old hat for Caleb Scapillato, 12, of Crystal Beach. He's been helping out at the Port Colborne and Welland Food Drive since he started accompanying his grandmother as a three-year-old.

taine to the annual charity event since he was three years of age.

"It's good for him to learn to help others, it builds character," said Lafontaine, a longtime volunteer who lives in Port Colborne. "It's not all about getting."

Scapillato said he likes helping others, especially families that aren't always able to feed their refrigerators and cupboards filled.

"I feel bad they can't afford food, but I feel happy that I can help out."

Lafontaine wasn't the only grandparent who used Saturday's food drives as an opportunity to teach a life lesson. Denis and Fran Bouchard of Welland "recruited" Noah Wisnosky, 12, and sister Emma, 9, both of Hamilton, to be part of their door-to-door team, while Dryden Lacroix, 8, accompanied grandparents Mike and Aline Carreus on their route.

"It's good experience for our grandkids to be involved in the



Notre Dame College School student Emily Burkholder, foreground, sorts food donations at the Welland Food Drive. The volunteer hours will go toward the Grade 9 student's community service requirement.

community," Fran Bouchard said.

Noah Wisnosky skipped practice with his house league hockey team to assist the Welland Food Drive for the second year in a row.

"I really don't like practice all that much," he said with an av-

erage shrug.

"Don't let him fool you, he really wanted to do this," his grandmother said.

It took the Bouchards and Carreus a little more than an hour to complete their canvass of a route that included sections of River and Ross roads, as well

as Dorothy, Evan and McMaster streets.

They estimated response to the appeal for donations at about 50 per cent on their route.

"If we didn't see anything on the porch, we would knock on the door," Fran Bouchard said.

This personal touch bore fruit in many instances.

"A lot of the time they went to the kitchen and got some stuff together for us," Denis Bouchard said.

Before leaving for their section, the Bouchards made sure to leave donations on their doorsteps.

High school students accumulated community service hours by volunteering their time and in Port Colborne about 10 members of a Girl Guides group took part to earn badges for community service.

Jane Tate, the group's leader, wasn't surprised by the response.

"At the start of the year, we asked the girls what they

wanted from Guides," she said. "Camping was first and, right after that, was community service."

Thinking about why she was sorting donations was an eye-opener for girl guide Lauren Murray, 11, of Port Colborne.

"I can't imagine going to the grocery store and not having enough money to feed your family," she said.

Girl guide Allison Vello, 9, said no one should do without when it comes to food and water.

"They would be healthy, just like us," she said. "That makes me sad."

Though Lakeshore Catholic High School student Andre Lafleur already has enough community services "to graduate two times over," he came out to lend a hand. He spent his time at the Port Colborne drop-off depot wheeling dollies piled with boxes of sorted donations into a tractor-trailer.

See NEED on A8

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POSTMEDIA

I've been thinking about being kind to others

REX THOMAS RARTH
First Evangelical Lutheran Church

I'm not a big sports fan, when I was a kid my Dad watched Hockey Night in Canada every Saturday evening. I started right after Hee Haw. I was in the room, but I wasn't drawn to the screen. I found it boring. So I'd be playing with my toys, or reading, or solving a crossword puzzle, or any number of other things while the game was on the TV in the background.

When I was a teenager I became crazy about basketball — this was before the Raptors and my team was the Boston Celtics. I'd watch any basketball game that was on TV. Saturday afternoons I'd watch one college game after another. Sunday afternoons I'd watch one pro game after another. I even went to see a couple of pre-season exhibition games at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto and Cops Colliseum in Hamilton.

In the early '90s I jumped on the bandwagon when the Blue Jays were winning

championships and World Series. Living in Burlington at the time, I would go to a couple of games a year at the dome.

But I fell in love and married a woman who is not a sports fan and we've raised four kids who aren't sports fans. Perhaps as a result of that, I'm no longer a sports fan. I do manage to get them a little worked up to watch and cheer for Germany (the country of our ethnic heritage) every four years when the World Cup comes around (that's soccer for anyone who doesn't know).

I didn't watch this year's World Series (back to baseball for a moment), but I followed what was going on. It was really neat to see the joy of Chicago Cubs fans. I'm writing this the day after they pulled out an extra innings squeaker after coming back from being down three games to one to Cleveland. After not being in the World Series for 71 years and not winning a World Series for 108 years this really was a feel-good story.



AP/WIDEWORLD

See KING on A6

A parody election sign is seen in the yard of James Hurd in Arlington, Virginia.

Still waiting for the Region to hit a home run



GRANT
LAFICHE

I will say this for Niagara's regional council it never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

Councillors are only human, so we have to cut them a degree of slack. No one expects them to put the ball over the fence each and every time at bat, but is a measly double-play now and again so much to ask for? Heck, we'd take a single, or even accept

a walk because the pitcher threw a fast ball at council's brain case.

But no, these folks are bound and determined to swing their bat of hopelessness at any damn thing thrown their way. And I mean anything. To conclude my really terrible baseball analogy, council would strike out swinging at an Imaginary baseball even after being told the ball wasn't really there.

Council watchers will know I am referring to the recent choice of Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's CAO Carmen D'Angelo as Niagara Region's new chief administrative officer.

You remember D'Angelo, don't you? He was the guy the Niagara Regional Police services board gave \$25,000 of your

money to last year to produce a public opinion survey that was so full of methodological errors it wasn't just debunked in this column, but expertly exposed by a member of the police services board itself.

But we'll get to those details in a moment.

By way of background, it is useful to remember the events that brought us to this point.

You may recall that the relationship between the last man who held the CAO position, Harry Schlange, had a less than smooth relationship with some members of council, and particularly when it came to Chairman Alan Caslin.

In fact, that relationship soured to the point that council

voted to create a task force to hire a "mentor" for Caslin and Schlange. In effect, the tension between the regional chair and CAO was so bad, council wanted to hire a relationship coach for them.

Schlange baited out and took the CAO job in Brampton. When he left, Schlange penned a sharply worded, Nostradamus-like letter critical of council's leadership that said unless things change, Niagara will continue to decline and council's



D'ANGELO

credibility would fade.

The entire affair did not exactly leave Niagara's regional government with a great reputation and you'd have to think that a potential CAO with serious chops would have to think twice about diving into this particular viper's nest.

So a recruitment committee was struck — which included two members of the NPACA, Welland Mayor Frank Campion and Grimsby Council, Tony Quirk — to find the next CAO.

Which brings us to last Monday's special meeting of council to decide the matter. The meeting's time meant several councillors could not attend and vote, drawing complaints of St. Catharines councillor Brian

Heit and Pelham Mayor Dave Augustyn. Indeed, the need for a special meeting is as baffling as it was unnecessary. Does council want the public to seriously believe the decision to pick a new CAO could not wait until Thursday of this week when the full council convenes? That three lousy days were that critical that some councillors could be shut out from voting?

That doesn't pass my political smell test.

(It is worth noting that every member of council at that meeting that also sits on the NPACA board, save for Bill Hodgson, voted for D'Angelo becoming the CAO.)

See REGION on A6

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Of course, many music fans today can still recall these classic lyrics from the Elvis Presley song "Blue Christmas", which topped the record charts back in 1957. Of course, in addition to this tune "The King of Rock & Roll" scored an incredible number of smash hits during his career from the 1950's to the 1970's.

On Sunday December 11th at 3pm, the music and life of Elvis Presley will be celebrated in a special Christmas show. "Elvis: Blue Christmas" starring Gino Monopoli in the title role, backed by the amazing Memphis Cats Band. Local Elvis fans will be in for a real treat, as Gino is widely regarded as one of the most internationally acclaimed Elvis Tribute Artists on the circuit today.

The show will be divided into two parts, with the first portion of the show dedicated to Elvis' early Rock & Roll career and songs such as "That's Alright Mama" "All Shook Up" and "Love Me". The second half of the show reaches into the latter portion of his career including such hits as "Suspicious Minds" and "Are You Lonesome Tonight" amongst the classics. Christmas classics to be performed include "Blue Christmas" "Santa Bring My Baby Back" and "White Christmas".

Tickets to see "Elvis: Blue Christmas" starring Gino Monopoli on Sunday December 11th at 3pm at the Roselawn Theatre are now on sale for only \$32 all inclusive and are available at the theatre box office located at 296 Fielden Avenue in Port Colborne, or by calling 905-834-7572. Don't miss out on this special one night only performance, get your tickets now!

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Region will pay for Council's mistakes

REGION from A4

This decision strains credibility to the breaking point.

As CAO of the NPCA, D'Angelo was responsible for a budget in the neighbourhood of \$10 million. As CAO of the Region, he would be responsible for a budget of \$1 billion.

Yes, billion. With a B. D'Angelo has never managed a budget that size. Moreover, that regional budget includes areas of public interest - including public health, policing, public works, regional housing and social welfare - he has no serious professional experience with.

According to D'Angelo's bio provided by the Region this week, along with working for the NPCA, he has worked as a paramedic chief and manager, and also was the director for the Hamilton Health Sciences paramedic education and research department. By comparison, Schlange was the CAO of Fort Erie and Loyalist Township, and held private sector gigs at General Motors and IBM prior to becoming Niagara's CAO.

Whether you believe Schlange was a good CAO for Niagara or not, whether you think his particular leadership style was effec-

tive or not, there is no question he was eminently qualified for the job.

D'Angelo doesn't have the depth of Schlange's experience or expertise.

In fact, the one time we have seen D'Angelo in action outside of the NPCA was in the aforementioned flaming train wreck of a police services board survey. As I noted in past columns, D'Angelo created a survey that was invalid from a scientific point of view because the survey could be taken by anyone multiple times. I took it around a dozen times from different computers in different locations around St. Catharines to prove the point.

But police board member Vaughn Stewart went a step further. D'Angelo said he could protect the survey's integrity by filtering out any duplicate IP addresses. Stewart took the survey 22 times, changing his IP address each time by rebooting his router, and recording each new IP address. He then challenged D'Angelo to demonstrate he had actually identified those IP addresses as duplicates and filtered them out of his final results. If he could, D'Angelo would have

proved his survey was valid.

He didn't. Citing privacy concerns, he would not reveal if he caught those IP addresses or not, which is particularly weird since Stewart was asking for the addresses generated by his own personal computer.

(Also of note, police board chairman and Niagara Falls Coun. Bob Gale, board member Caslin and former police board member and St. Catharines Coun. Andy Petrowski - who labelled that survey as a "home run" - voted for D'Angelo.)

If D'Angelo could not handle the absurdly simple task of a survey, why should we have confidence that he can manage the exponentially more complicated task of Niagara Region itself? That police survey wasted \$25,000 of public money. Mistakes made by the regional CAO will cost a lot more than that.

The problem, however, is not really D'Angelo, but with the credibility of the council that selected him.

When the next survey-style boondoggle occurs, it will be the council that will be held to account by the public.

gluffelche@postmedia.com

Election will leave people extremely divided

KIND from A4

It was a feel-good story at a time it was sorely needed. By the time you read this the U.S. will have elected a new president. No matter who the winner is, this election campaign, and politics in general, has left people extremely divided.

And you'd be hard pressed to know what the policies of either candidate are. Even watching the ads run by local campaigns across the border, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with what candidates stand for, but instead focuses on personal attacks.

I've frequently heard people

who wonder why the parties couldn't find any better candidates than the ones who ended up running. I often think that better qualified, highly intelligent candidates who might run for the purpose of actually serving the public rather than themselves, don't come forward because they don't want to subject themselves to the kind of hateful rhetoric that inevitably comes from such a contest.

Can't we make the world, our nations, our communities, better places than they are? I'm not talking about policies and platforms, but about loving our

neighbours. Human nature is for us to look out for ourselves, and perhaps those closest to us. But by the grace of God and the gift of love that God grants to us we, can actually overcome that natural tendency, at least some times, and live for each other and do what will make life better for everyone.

The Golden Rule: "Do for others what you would like them to do for you," is found in the writings of almost every religion on earth. It might go against our nature, but it can be done.

The good news is that's a feel-good story. It's what we all need.

If you have a story idea or see news happening, we want to hear from you --
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Lots of people volunteer to restock shelves

NEED from A3

Lafleur, whose mother works at Port Cares, also donates his time working at the community agency's reach-out centre.

The 15-year-old doesn't mind accepting hotdogs that were offered to volunteers at the dropoff depot, but he draws the line at sharing in the food that's served to cli-

ents at the reach-out centre.

"I can't eat their food, it defeats the purpose," he said. "Try having to deal with that (hunger) on a day-to-day basis, I don't."

Donations collected in Welland, including a truckload of food and toys courtesy of the United Nations, will be shared equally by the Hope Centre, Open

Arms Mission and the Salvation Army. All of the donations collected in Port Colborne are earmarked for Port Cares.

Organizers of the two drives couldn't say enough about the generosity in their communities.

"As long as it's required, Wellandians answer the call," Monique Finley, chair-

woman of the Welland Food Drive committee, said.

"We don't know the percentage (of people taking part), but Port Colborne is a very giving community. It's awesome," said Jeremy Hamm, food drive co-ordinator for the Port Colborne Lions Club.

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IN
BRIEF**Region's acting on
CAO's absence**

Niagara Region's acting chief administrative officer is on a leave of

absence.

Mo Lewis, the municipality's corporate services commissioner who has been filling in as acting CAO since the departure of Harry Schlangin in May, has been on leave since Nov. 2 and is not expected to return until Nov. 14.

That's the same day Carmen D'Angelo, who last Monday was appointed by council to fill the CAO

role permanently, is scheduled to assume his position as the Region's top bureaucrat.

Asked about Lewis's absence, Regional Chairman Alan Caslin issued the following statement by e-mail: "Acting CAO Maurice Lewis is currently on a leave of absence. Ron Tripp, Niagara Region's commissioner of public works, is currently the acting CAO."

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REVIEW

The Standard

THE

TRIBUNE

'We are trying to get FOIs answered'

AUDIT from A2

"That's what the forensic audit would do. It would trace where there are problems."

Smith said he made 12 FOI requests in all. Some of the requests dealt with large contracts.

"They have fulfilled some of the benign ones," Smith said. "The pointed ones — the ones we were really interested in getting responses about — were denied. We have appealed them to the Privacy Commissioner. It's not dead yet. From the outside looking in, as a taxpayer, it looks like the NPCA is undisciplined and may have crossed some ethical lines. We feel a forensic audit is warranted."

Timms said the responsibilities for Freedom of Information requests are delegated to Mike Reles, a communications specialist/freedom of information and privacy co-ordinator with the conservation authority.

"As I understand it, he fol-

When Ed appealed, they said they couldn't locate the documents. If you are spending \$40,000 or \$50,000 in contracts, you should be able to provide documentation. That's what the forensic audit would do. It would trace where there are problems."

Cindy Forster

lows the protocols, standards and regulations," Timms said. "We do our due diligence for

those things and follow the process. It does take time and labour, and that's not the only job Mike has at the conservation authority."

The Standard attempted to authenticate some of the citizen group's FOI requests, and the responses they received. The conservation authority was unwilling to do that.

"We have forwarded this to legal counsel for defamation review," Reles said in an e-mail. "Therefore, I cannot provide comment at this time."

Forster said there is public interest in taking a look at the conservation authority.

"I've had calls in the last week from former regional councillors, from mayors, sitting city councillors in municipalities around Niagara," she said. "I had a former chair of the NPCA call my office yesterday and make arrangements to come in and sit down and talk with me."

bsawchuk@postmedia.com

Bombs contained aerosol cans and firearms ammo

BOMBS from A2

Firefighters found the man in the front yard and treated him with paramedics. He was taken to Welland hospital, then transferred to Hamilton General Hospital in critical condition with severe smoke inhalation.

His condition last Wednesday night was not disclosed by police. The fire caused about \$200,000 damage.

Inside the home, firefighters found several "improvised explosive devices," police said. The neighbouring area was evacuated until 11 that Sunday night.

The NRP's explosive disposal

unit responded with bomb technicians, to locate and neutralize the devices.

In an interview with Postmedia in the days that followed, Det. Sgt. Wayne Genders said at least four IEDs were found within the upper apartment, including one that incorporated a typical backyard barbecue propane tank.

"If that would have blown it would have levelled the house and there'd be collateral damage to the surrounding homes," he said three days after the fire, which put firefighters at greater risk.

"That could have been devast-

tating. I could just imagine what could have happened there. Never mind property damage, the loss of life could have been huge."

The bombs were also constructed of various items that included aerosol cans and firearm ammunition.

Fire Chief Brian Kennedy said after the fire some rooms upstairs were destroyed, but other rooms only had water and smoke damage, explaining that's one of the reasons the IEDs did not detonate.

—with files from Welland Tribune and Tony Riccio

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